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CALIFORNIANS STEP UP FIGHT AGAINST OBESITY *Californians Are Encouraged to Accept Governor's Challenge to Build Healthy Communities and Raise Healthy Kids*

SACRAMENTO – State health officials today urged all Californians to take charge of their health by eating healthy and being physically active at a State Capitol rally to kick off National Public Health Week, April 3-9. This year's theme, "Designing Healthy Communities, Raising Healthy Kids," focuses on the development of safe environments that allow access to nutritious foods and physical activity as well as instilling healthy habits in children.

"We are facing an epidemic of obesity that threatens the public health of California and the rest of the nation," said Sandra Shewry, director of the California Department of Health Services (CDHS). "We must improve our children's nutrition and level of physical activity if we are going to reverse this trend."

CDHS and the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports hosted the event and were joined by Council Chairman Jake "Body by Jake" Steinfeld, former Oakland Raider Vance Mueller and five-time gold medalist Dr. Eric Heiden.

At the rally, all Californians were urged to complete the Governor's Challenge by signing up online and logging in daily to track physical activity for at least four weeks. As an incentive, any Californian who completes the challenge will earn a reward from the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. High school students who sign up can earn nearly a semester of free access to a 24-Hour Fitness facility. The Governor's Challenge can be found online at www.CalGovCouncil.org.

"The Governor's Challenge is about motivating each of us to set and achieve personal fitness goals to look and feel great," said Steinfeld. "We're encouraging all Californians, especially kids and teens, to get active so they can feel the benefits associated with physical fitness."

Obesity is projected to cost the state \$28 billion in 2005. More than half of California adults are currently overweight or obese, and 38 percent of California children ages 9 to 11 are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight. Improving dietary practices and physical activity are proven strategies for preventing many of the chronic diseases that account for more than 75 percent of medical costs in the United States.

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Governor Schwarzenegger has led the fight against California's obesity epidemic. Since becoming Governor, he has initiated both state and national efforts to raise awareness about the obesity epidemic, including:

- Signing landmark legislation giving California public schools the strongest nutritional standards in the nation by getting sodas and junk food out of schools.
- Signing legislation to ensure more fresh fruits and vegetable are offered through free and reduced meal programs at schools.
- Convening a summit of leaders and experts from the business, education, government and public health communities to fundamentally change core business practices to encourage Californians to make healthier choices.
- Unveiling an ambitious, forward-reaching 10-point vision of a healthy California that challenges government, business, community organizations and individuals to make California a national model for healthy living.
- Proposing \$85 million in his 2006-07 budget to provide resources to support PE instruction, improve student health and expand curricular opportunities for students.

"We must not compromise our commitment to raising healthier kids and building healthier communities," said Kimberly Belshé, secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency. "Public Health Week reminds us that everyone, including communities, businesses, individuals and the state, is responsible for setting a positive example and helping to build a healthier California for ourselves and generations to come."

At the rally, Riverside County was commended for being selected as one of five National Public Health Week Blue Ribbon Model Communities by the American Public Health Association for developing a series of safe sidewalks and walking routes to make physical activity and healthy eating more accessible.

The Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, which the Governor reconstituted in June 2005, also unveiled a new television public service announcement scheduled to air this month that encourages children to be active and experience the "all-natural high" of endorphins that comes from sports and physical activity.

To promote healthy eating and physical activity, California has implemented a number of initiatives that provide nutrition education and resources for children and their parents, especially those in low-income households. CDHS' *California Nutrition Network for Healthy, Active Families* works with more than 300 different public, nonprofit and business partners throughout the state to empower low-income Californians to consume the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables and enjoy physical activity every day with such campaigns as *California 5 a Day*. For more information, log on to the *Network* Web site at www.ca5aday.com.